

When the Going Gets Tough, Part 1 - Romans 7:15-19 – February 26th, 2012

- Today's teaching is part one of a series I've titled; "When the Going Gets Tough." By way of introduction I'll begin by asking two questions?
- First, have you ever wondered why one minute you can be worshipping and praising God, then the next minute find yourself totally in the flesh?
- Second, have you ever wondered why the spiritual struggle back and forth is so difficult, and why it seems to get worse as you grow in Christ?

- If the answer to these questions is yes, then be encouraged. I say that for a number of reasons not the least of which is you're in good company.
- Actually, not only are you in good company, but the very fact that you are struggling is a good sign. Why? It's evidence that the Spirit is working.
- I'll take it further and suggest that the spiritual struggle intensifies the more we mature and grow spiritually in our relationship with Jesus Christ.

- This explains why some professing Christians just live for themselves and the pleasures this world has to offer, and don't think that's a problem.
- In other words, they don't really have a struggle or even wrestle with those things that have taken up residence in their so-called Christian lives.
- The reason for this is that at some point they just caved in, and acquiesced to, the Devil, the flesh, and the world, thus no struggle could ensue.

One writer so aptly put it this way; "The struggle is a sign of spiritual life. Before I was converted, my pathetic attempt to turn over a new leaf cost little, and lasted less. As the Spirit gives me strength to struggle, it hurts much more. Two spies are captured: the one who resists torture suffers far more than the one who tells all at the first turn of the screw."

- If the truth be known, pastors, teachers, evangelists and Christians who lead others to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ may be at fault here.
- Let me explain; we're all prone to set people up for an epic failure when we paint the canvass of Christian life with the soft brush of an easy life.
- The fact of the matter is, nothing could be further from the truth because it's the opposite that's true. The Christian life is riddled with battles.

- We're seeing very clearly on Thursday nights, in our study of the book of Joshua. Possessing the Land cannot precede the battle for the land.
- Just because God has promised it to us, does not mean that it won't be a battle for us. The Christian life is not a playground it's a battleground.
- We do err when we develop a faulty mindset thinking we can take it easy, because it will be easy, when in reality it will be riddled with hardship.

- I'm of the belief we need look no further for the reason so many people either backslide, fall away, or were never truly born again to begin with.

Matthew 13:3-9 NIV Then he told them many things in parables, saying: "A farmer went out to sow his seed. (4) As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. (5) Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. (6) But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. (7) Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants. (8) Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop—a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown. (9) He who has ears, let him hear."

Matthew 13:18-23 NIV "Listen then to what the parable of the sower means: (19) When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is the seed sown along the path. (20) The one who received the seed that fell on rocky places is the man who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. (21) But since he has no root, he lasts only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, he quickly falls away. (22) The one who received the seed that fell among the thorns is the man who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke it, making it unfruitful. (23) But the one who received the seed that fell on good soil is the man who hears the word and understands it. He produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown."

- In this parable, Jesus is teaching us that unless the seed of God's Word is met with the supple soil of our minds and hearts, there will be no fruit.
- While we're given the different reasons all the others did not grow and produce a crop, there does seem to be some similarities with all of them.
- One hears it but doesn't understand it, another is shallow with no root, and the other is worried about, deceived by, and choked with life's riches.

- Now, here's the common denominator with all of them; they all had a faulty mindset thinking the Christian life is a playground not a battleground.
- The trampled down don't understand - the shallow with no root deep down don't last - the rich choked with worries they'll go down don't produce.
- They all become disillusioned when the trampling by the wayside, the heat of the day, and the troubles of life come on and in their Christian life.

- I believe this is one of the main reasons we have so much detail recorded about the Israelites. God prepares them for battles prepared for them.
- If you really stop and think about it, we don't want it any other way. If it's not hard, it's not worth it. The harder it is the more valuable it becomes.
- We are wired to devalue that which comes too easily, because the end product is cheapened, by virtue of how that the process was weakened.

- I've heard it said this way; "the bitterness of poor quality lingers on long after the sweetness of a cheap price." Yes, you can quote me on that!
- We, like with the Israelites wanting the Promised Land too easily, cheapen both the quality and victory of our Christianity by wanting it too easily.
- Then, when the spiritual battles in the Christian life trample us down, burn us out, and choke us up, we become disenchanting and disillusioned.

1 Corinthians 15:1-4 NIV (1) Now, brothers, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. (2) **By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain.** (3) For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, (4) that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures,

- Notice Paul says you are saved IF you hold firmly to the Word preached to you otherwise, you may fancy yourself a believer, but it is in vain.
- This would imply that it is a battle to "hold firmly" to the Word you heard preached. This means that there's the propensity for it to not take hold.
- IF the seed of God's Word falls on soil that's hard, dry, and full of thorns and thistles, then, even if it takes hold initially, it won't last eventually.

- The plow of preparation breaks the soil of the hardened heart, and rids the mind of the thorns and thistles of its stubbornness and obstinance.
- When the ground is plowed by counting the cost, picking up the cross and dying to self then it's ready for the new life in the seed of God's Word.
- When the ground is broken by the bad news of its fallow and shallow condition, the seed of the Good News germinates, sprouts, and bears fruit.

Hosea 10:12 NKJV Sow for yourselves righteousness; Reap in mercy; Break up your fallow ground, For *it is* time to seek the LORD, Till He comes and rains righteousness on you.

The fallow field is smug, contented, protected from the shock of the plow and the agitation of the harrow.... But it is paying a terrible price for its tranquility: Never does it see the miracle of growth; never does it feel the motions of mounting life nor see the wonders of bursting seed nor the beauty of ripening grain. Fruit it can never know because it is afraid of the plow and the harrow [till]. In direct opposite to this, the cultivated field has yielded itself to the adventure of living. The protecting fence has opened to admit the plow, and the plow has come as plows always come, practical, cruel, business-like and in a hurry. Peace has been shattered by the shouting farmer and the rattle of machinery. The field has felt the travail of change; it has been upset, turned over, bruised and broken, but its rewards come hard upon its labors. The seed shoots up into the daylight its miracle of life, curious, exploring the new world above it. All over the field the hand of God is at work in the age-old and ever renewed service of creation. New things are born, to grow, mature, and consummate the grand prophecy latent in the seed when it entered the ground. Nature's wonders follow the plow. A.W. Tozer, "Paths to Power," pp. 31-32

- This is why Paul says what he says in the text before us this morning. Oh how I wish we could hear the Apostles tone of voice in saying this.
- If we were somehow, and in some way allowed to hear it audibly, there would have to be a bitter anguish that comes screaming out of this man.
- It's painful really! I can almost hear Paul weeping, crying out in unspeakable wretchedness; "why, why Lord, why do I keep doing what I hate?"

- The simple yet blunt and rude answer is that the closer to Christ we are, the harder the battle will be and it won't let up until we are caught up.
- Right about now, you may be thinking to yourself how depressing and discouraging and not uplifting all of this is. Well, we signed up for this!
- When we surrender our lives to Jesus, we sign up for the struggle, and in so doing we've agreed to the terms which had disclosed the total cost.

- All too often, we just click our mouse on the "agree" button, without reading the terms, or counting the cost of what it means to pick up our cross.
- At the risk of sounding morbid, we are in effect agreeing to, and putting our signature on, our own death certificate to our old life before Christ.
- Absent this picking up of our cross, and dying to our self, we have no hope of ever tasting from the delicious cup of a victorious Christian life.

- Notice I didn't say, an easy or problem free Christian life, I said a victorious Christian life. In order for there to be a victory there must be a battle.
- The more bitter the battle, the sweeter the victory and thus the victory I'm the recipient of will be proportionate to the battle that I am engaged in.
- Enter Romans 7:15-19. What a graphic description of the battlefield within the heart of a maturing believer who is struggling with the sin nature.

1. I'm enabled to fight the battle (Verses 15-19)

(15) I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. (16) And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. (17) As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. (18) I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. (19) For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing.

- v15-16 Paul says I don't understand what I do because I don't do what I want to do, but I do what I hate to do, and if I do, I agree the law is good.
- v17 He explains that as it is, it is no longer I myself who does what I don't want to do, and that which I hate to do, because it is sin living in me.
- v18-19 He says it's not that I don't want to it's that I can't, as nothing good lives in me. What I keep doing isn't the good I want but the evil I don't.

- Paul's brutal battle begs the question of why is this so? Why am I unable to do the good I want, and instead I'm able to do the evil I don't want?
- The simple answer is the sinful nature. I'm unable because the sin that is living in me is rotten through and through. There's nothing good in me.
- Yes, the law, which I agree is good, is given to me, but the law cannot do anything for me. The law cannot enable me to do what I want to do.

- Herein lies the battle. I have the "want," but I don't have the "how" to do the "want." Furthermore, I need not only the "how," I need the "Who" to.
- Lord willing, next week, as we round the corner from chapter seven to chapter eight, the Apostle Paul will elaborate on "Who" it is that we need.
- Be that as it may, and suffice it to say, the very fact that the battle ensues, proves that I, in and of myself, will never be able to fight this myself.

- However, that doesn't stop me from trying. I keep on fighting in my flesh thinking that there must be at least something, one thing, good in me.
- This is what attracts us to "how to" books and seminars. Instead of writing more books on "how to," someone should write a book on "to Who."
- It would actually be a very short book, a booklet really, because I am not able, there is only One Who is able, and his name is Jesus the Christ.